



CITY of NORFOLK

Office of the Mayor

Paul D. Fraim
Mayor

April 4, 2013

The Honorable Tim Kaine
United States Senate
B40C Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
FAX: 202-228-6363

The Honorable Mark Warner
United States Senate
475 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
FAX: 202-224-6295

Dear Senator Kaine and Senator Warner:

As Americans, we should work to build a society that respects both the Second Amendment and the right to live free from gun violence in our schools, communities, and homes. Tragedies like Newtown and Aurora make headlines and shock the conscience. And yet these mass murders tell only part of America's gun violence story. Every day 33 people are murdered with guns, more than one per hour. A common sense, comprehensive, and enforceable background check requirement is the single most important step we can take. I urge you to support the omnibus reform bill before Congress (S.649 / H.R. 137), which also includes provisions to crack down on trafficking and to increase school safety. I also ask you to vote for the ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines (S.150 / H.R. 437).

As I write this letter, the most dangerous people in the country can buy guns without getting a background check, no questions asked. Felons, domestic violence offenders, and the seriously mentally ill can simply arm themselves through so-called "private" sellers - for example, by answering one of 68,000 listings on Armslist.com. Indeed, this is exactly how criminals find their guns. Nearly 80 percent of inmates who committed gun crimes obtained their guns through private transfers.

Now is the time to stop these deadly gun sales. We know how to do it - we've already built a background check system that works. Since 1998, the federal law requiring licensed dealers to run checks has stopped more than two million prohibited purchases in their tracks. The states that go beyond federal law and require checks for private sales have had dramatic results. Women in those states are 38 percent less likely to be shot to death by intimate partners than other women, and in-state trafficking is 48 percent lower than in the rest of the country.

The current system works because it requires dealers to keep records of these background checks, and it is important that the new bill extend that system to private sales. Police rely on dealer records to catch criminals. Without a paper trail for private gun sales, law enforcement often can't trace a murder weapon to the criminal who used it. And without the potential risk that cops in pursuit will request a background check record, private sellers will have little incentive to run the check. Private sellers currently have no such incentive and criminals know this.

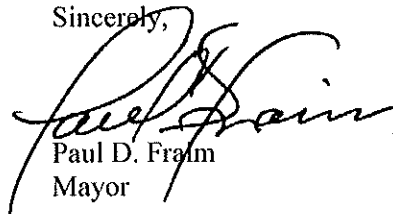
As one of more than 900 mayors in the bipartisan Mayors Against Illegal Guns coalition, I can tell you that mayors get too many calls informing them of yet another tragic gun death. Too many times we hear that a simple background check at the point of sale would have prevented the murder. These checks take only a few minutes, and gun owners take and pass them all the time. That's why 82 percent of gun owners - along with 92 percent of the public and even 74 percent of National Rifle Association members - support expanding the background check system to cover all sales and transfers. They know that the two minutes it takes to pass a background check is a small price to pay to save lives.

I also ask you to support the ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, weapons of war that have no place on our streets. As Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn recently told the Senate Judiciary Committee, police have been "in an arms race" with criminals who carry increasingly dangerous weapons. Indeed, assault weapons and high-capacity magazines are used in as many as 41 percent of fatal police shootings, and they are a common thread linking the mass shootings in Newtown, Aurora, Tucson, Virginia Tech, and Oak Creek. When these weapons are used in mass shootings, they gravely increase the damage done - leading to 135 percent more people shot and 57 percent more deaths than in other incidents.

Let's not wait for the next tragedy. Let's not ignore the mounting daily death toll. I urge you to help ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. I urge you to support comprehensive and enforceable background checks, and to make sure that private sales are governed by the same proven system already in place for dealer sales.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Paul D. Fraim
Mayor

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